Chapter 1

Youth Development: Building and Sustaining a Seamless Network of Services and Opportunities

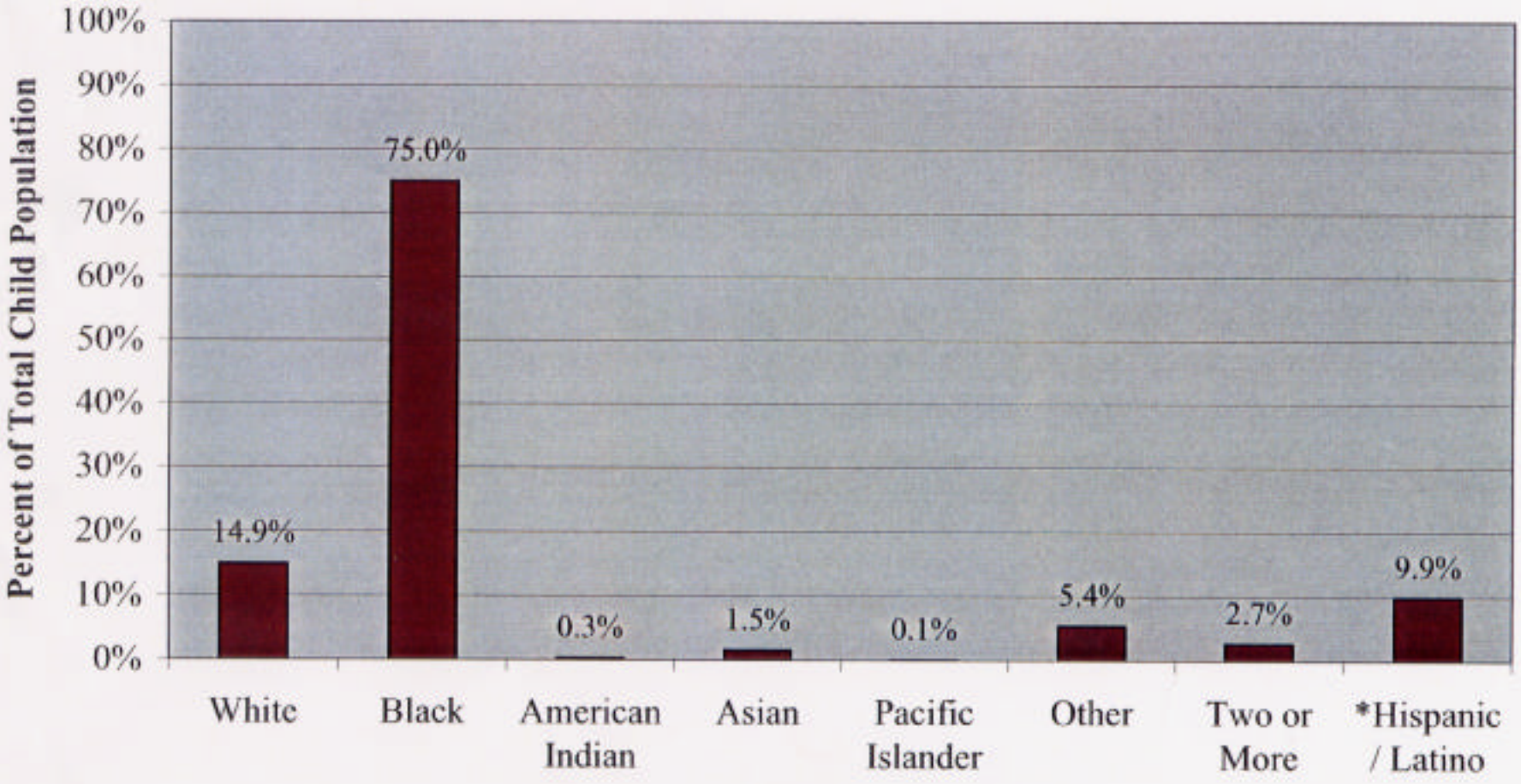
Youth development has been variously defined as a body of theory and practice that promotes an appreciation of youth assets. In its blueprint for its own local efforts, the Hampton (Virginia) Youth Commission also defines youth development as the process that ensures that children and youth are "ready to become the workforce and community leaders of the twenty-first century."[1] The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development adds that "healthy youth development strives to help young people develop the inner resources and skills they need to cope with pressures that might lead them into unhealthy and antisocial behaviors" (Dryfoos 1998).

The Youth Development Subcommittee of the Commission was charged with the responsibility to investigate and analyze youth in the context of the broader social, cultural, and geographic environments (See Figures 3 and 4). The main objective was to make recommendations that address strategies to meet the needs for community-based services and opportunities. Subcommittee members discussed public and private strategies of community and youth development, reviewed primary and secondary data bearing on the well-being of children and youth, and analyzed policy recommendations in the context of discussions with public officials, advocates, and youth. Several themes emerged in youth focus groups attended by some Commission members, as well as in

[1] The Hampton, Virginia Youth Commission (materials in Appendix D) integrates youth into many aspects of city planning processes in a very comprehensive manner.

Figure 3

Youth Population (0-17) by Single Race and Hispanic Origin, 2000

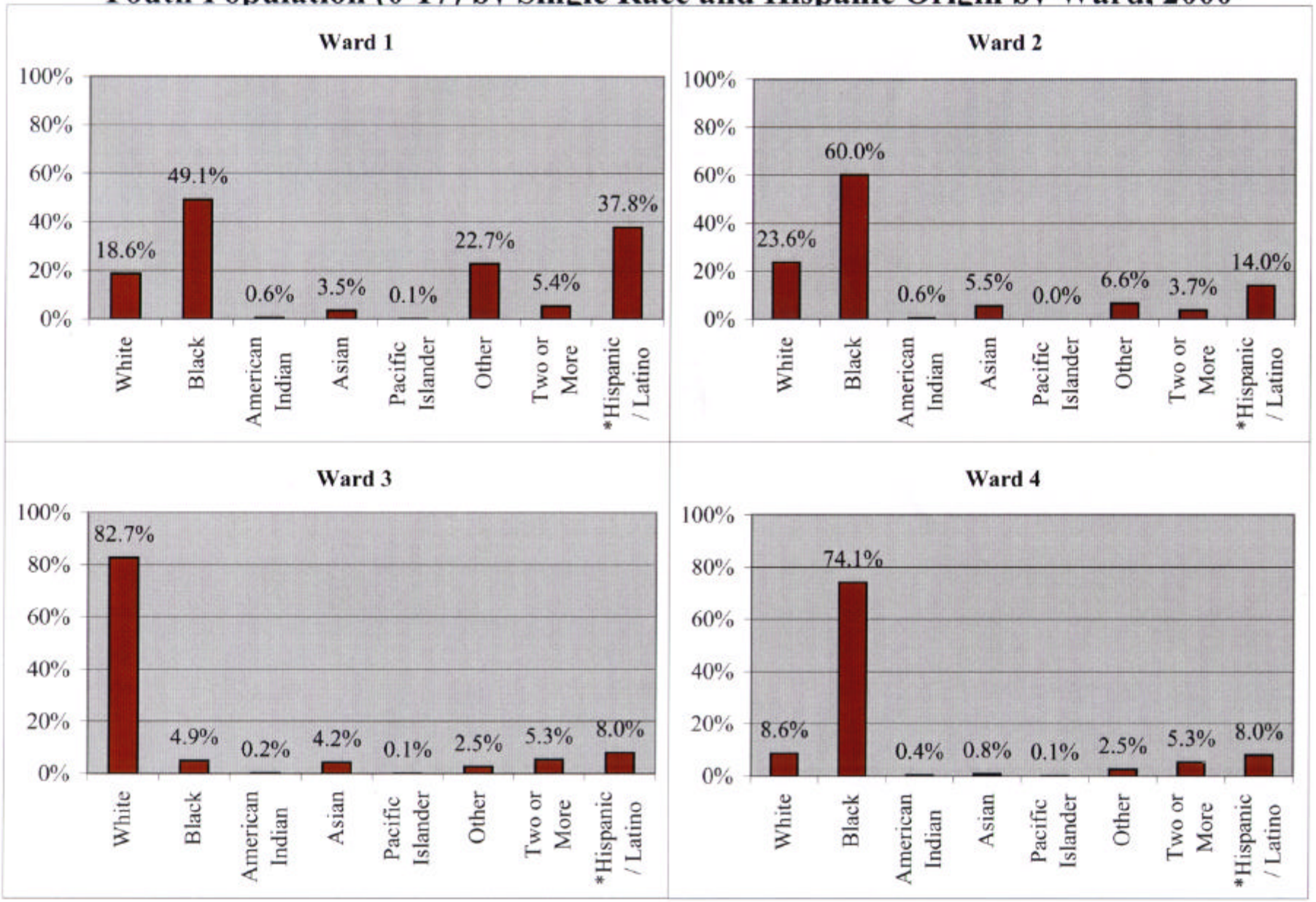


SOURCE: US Census Bureau, Census 2000 Redistricting Data

* Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race

Figure 4

Youth Population (0-17) by Single Race and Hispanic Origin by Ward, 2000

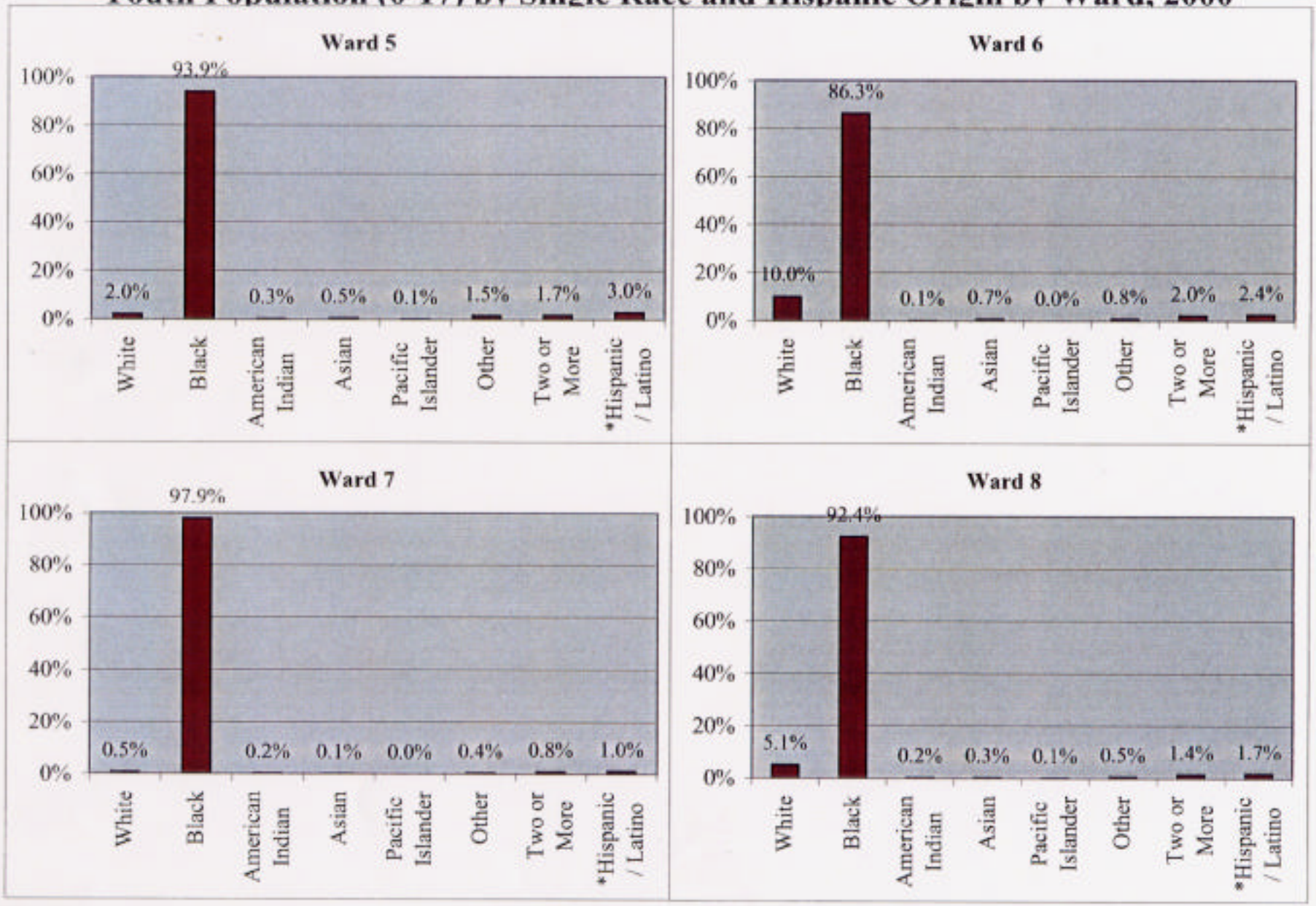


SOURCE: US Census Bureau, Census 2000 Redistricting Data

* Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race

Figure 4

Youth Population (0-17) by Single Race and Hispanic Origin by Ward, 2000



SOURCE: US Census Bureau, Census 2000 Redistricting Data

* Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race

presentations at full Commission meetings. Youth Development Subcommittee members also conducted site visits to Boston, Hampton (Virginia), and New York City to learn more about integrated public and private partnerships and strategies for community and youth development.

Commission members agreed that strategies for youth development must be framed primarily in the context of other healthy community strategies.[2] For example, children and youth should be viewed as critical components of the District of Columbia's economic development agenda. Employment and housing opportunities sustain options for social and economic mobility for youth and their households. In this context, strategies to assess what to do with vacant and under utilized property targeted for private development should be linked with community and policy conversations related to the assessment of capacity for recreational and community-based programming options. This is also a pervading theme voiced among youth, youth providers, and health and human service providers working to preserve the broader safety net for children, youth, and families.

To summarize, the Youth Development Subcommittee and Commission's prioritization of policy recommendations views the following as foundational to youth development and the preservation of youth safety:

- Youth voices in decision-making and policy processes

[2]Lola Odubekun, Ph.D., Youth Development Analysis Framework Paper prepared for Youth Development Subcommittee (2001).

- Academic enrichment and mentoring
- Workforce development and training
- Economic and community development and security
- Supportive health and social supports

Data and Information: Measuring Child, Youth, and Community Well-Being

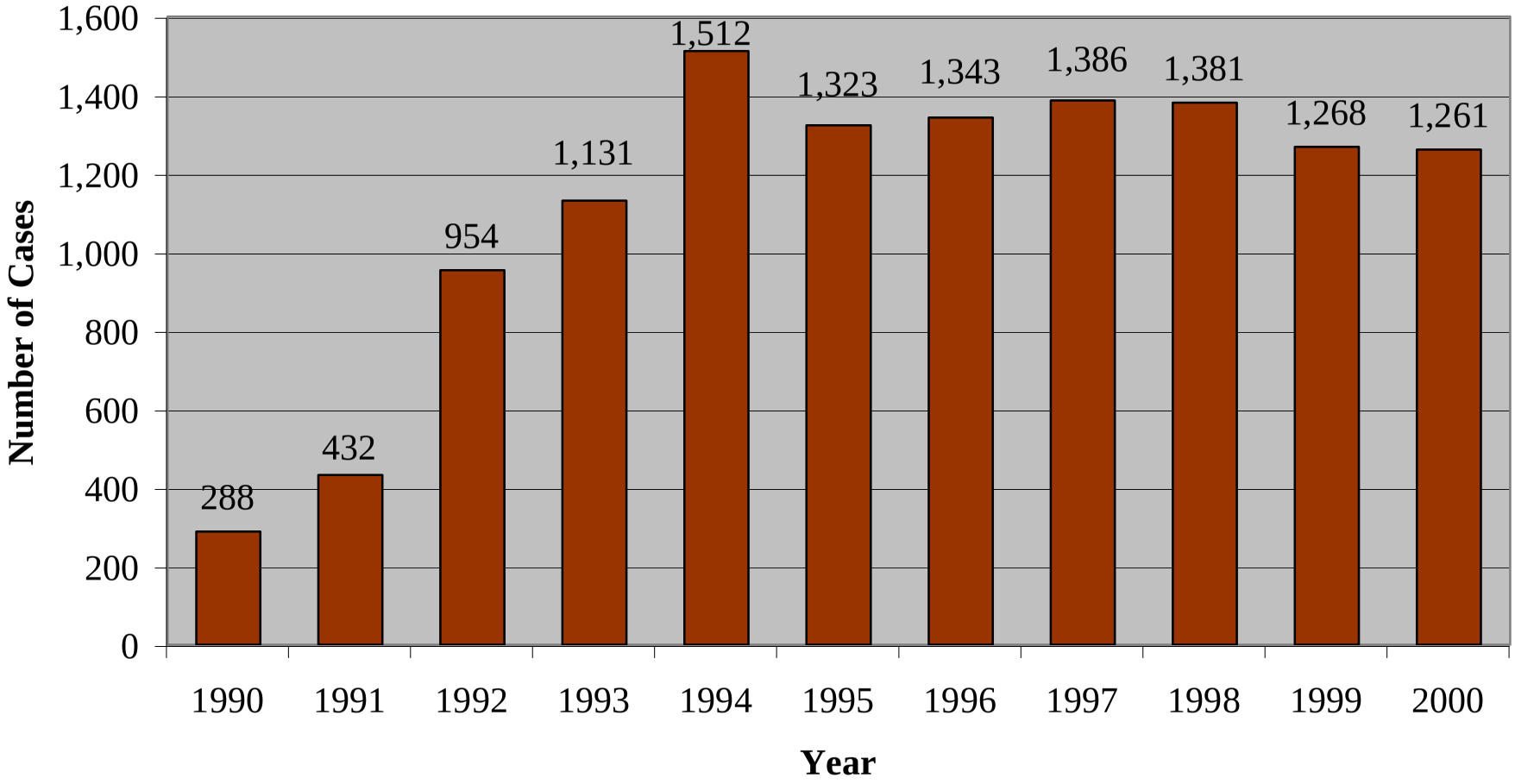
Challenges exist to document needs, opportunities, and policy impacts related to youth development because of the diversity of sometimes incomparable data sets. One of the most important contextual pieces for this discussion has been the 1999 Urban Institute *Capacity and Needs Assessment*. Authorized by the Council of the District of Columbia and conducted by the District of Columbia's Mayor's Office in partnership with Georgetown University, the Urban Institute, and the University of the District of Columbia, the Urban Institute's 1999 report provides important historical information on youth services, capacity, and utilization. Comprehensive in scope, the report covered aspects of youth safety, economic development, child and family services, and juvenile justice.

The Urban Institute's 1999 study is important as an historical marker for certain baseline data related to child, youth, and community well-being, but it does not reflect the impact of more recent policies and programs designed to improve youth safety and expand access and improve the quality of health and social services for youth. Recent downward trends in youth violence and crime, as well as in reported abuse and neglect

cases, suggest that there may be a correlation between human and social services delivery and the recent decline in cases documented at the District of Columbia Courts (See Figures 5 and 6). With respect to "Child Neglect," cases filed declined from a high in 1994 of 1,512 to 1,268 in 1999. Between 1999 and 2000, cases filed declined 18.8%. In the case of "Child Abuse," case filings have fallen from 304 in 1998 to 156 in 2000. While high profile media stories in recent years have singled out extreme examples of juvenile super-predators and bureaucratic and judicial lapses in child welfare (which largely preceded the current Administration), more definitive research is needed on an ongoing basis to assess the specific impact of various factors on child and family well being.

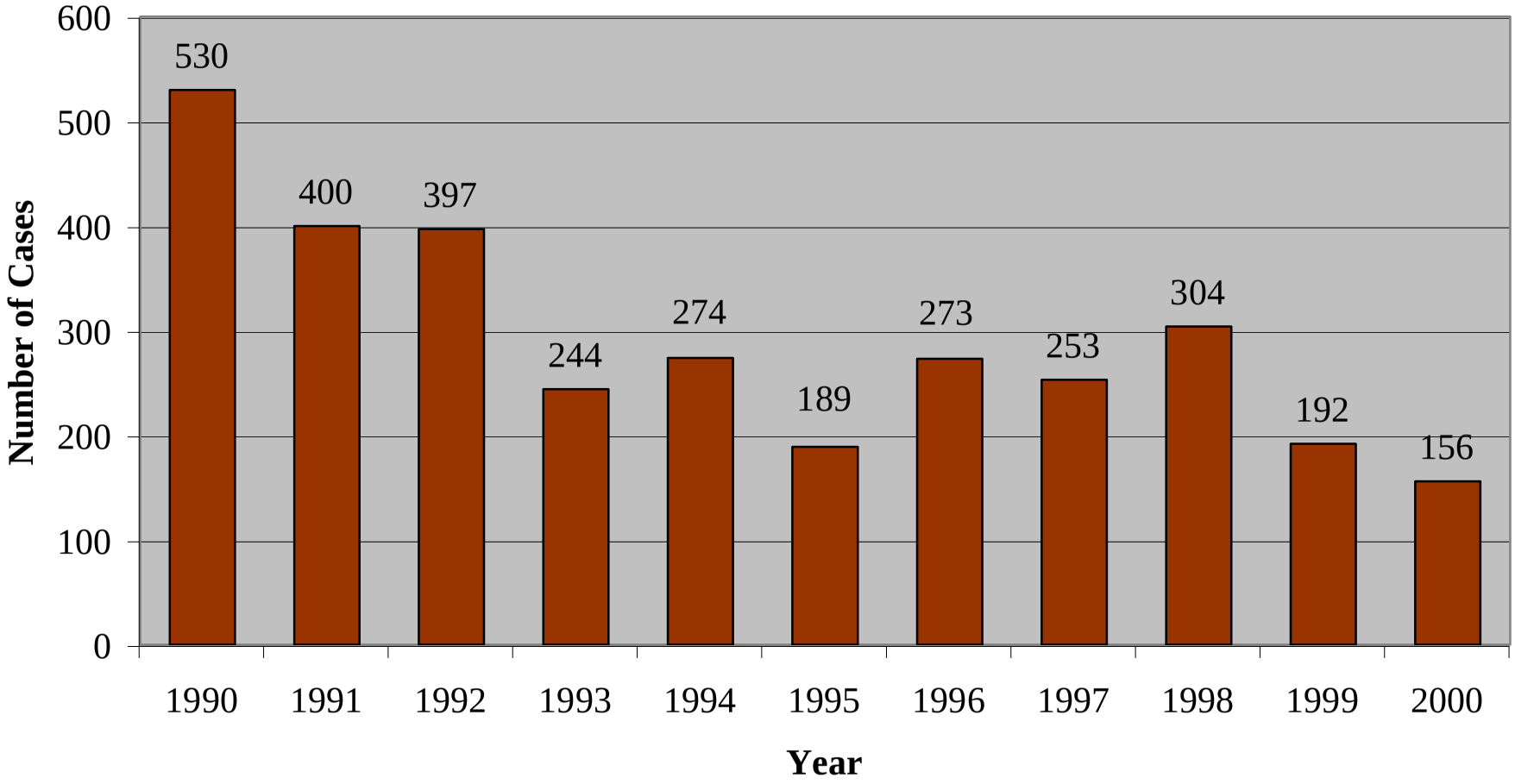
Specifically, longitudinal studies should be designed to analyze how changes in delivery vehicles, the leveraging of public and private investments in new ways, overall population changes, and internal management shifts at the Court and local government have recently impacted outcomes for children and families. Pronounced declines in youth violence and improvement in selected indicators of child and family well-being have also occurred under the guidance of Mayor Williams' human services' team, which has succeeded in bringing the city out of a number of receiverships that impact the delivery of child and family services in community contexts. Marked declines in teenage pregnancy rates and reduction in recipients receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), for example, have occurred since the Urban Institute's study was issued. Major strides in building community-based capacity for recreation and academic enrichment, such as the opening of the Southeast Tennis Center and the launch of a new

Figure 5
Cases Filed for Child Neglect
District of Columbia Courts, 1990-2000



SOURCE: District of Columbia Courts, Annual Reports

Figure 6
Cases Filed for Child Abuse
District of Columbia Courts, 1990-2000



SOURCE: District of Columbia Courts, Annual Reports

computer facility at the Bald Eagle Recreation Center, have also taken place. These centers are both in areas earlier identified as in "severe need." This is in addition to broader policy initiatives, such as Medicaid and child insurance coverage expansion, which have been aggressively implemented in communities living below 200% of the federal poverty level.

Demographic Characteristics of Children and Youth in the District of Columbia

Information about the demographic characteristics of youth was pulled from a diverse set of sources, including the District of Columbia Office of Planning, local and national foundations, community-based organizations, and area researchers.

According to the United States Census Bureau's analysis of 2000 Census Data, the District of Columbia Population is 572,059. Approximately 20.1% of the city's population is under the age of 18. Persons under the age of 5 constitute 5.7% of the total youth population (See Figure 3).

In terms of the city's landscape, there is also a noticeable difference in the representation of children and youth as a percentage of each ward's population. The representation of youth as a percentage of the total population ranges from 10.6% and 12.9% in Wards 2 and 3, respectively, to 27.9% in Ward 7 and 36.7% in Ward 8.

When the city's total youth population is analyzed by race and Hispanic origin, White children constitute 14.9% of the total. Black/African American youth constitute 75.0% o the total, American Indian/Alaskan Native 0.3%, Asian 1.5%, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander 0.1%, and Hispanic/Latino 9.9%.

Wards also reflect varied experiences based on race and Hispanic origin. Using the wards with the highest and lowest number of youth as a percentage of total population, White children constitute 23.6% of the Ward 2 population with Black/African Americans representing 60.0%, American Indian/Alaskan Natives 0.6%, Asian 5.5%, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander 0.0%, and Hispanic/Latino14.0%. In Ward 8, where 36.7% of residents are under the age of 18, White children constitute 5.1% of the total youth population and Black/African American youth represent 92.4%, American Indian/Alaskan Native 0.2%, Asian 0.3%, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander 0.1%, and Hispanic/Latino 1.7%.

In terms of socioeconomic experiences, 25.5% of children in the District of Columbia live in poverty. Stark differences in per capita income among the city's wards are also a good indicator that children in poverty are concentrated in various communities and neighborhoods as well. Children and youth represent 12.4% of the residents in Ward 3, the ward with the highest per capita income of $63,340, while Ward 8, with 33.2% of its residents under 18 years of age, has the lowest per capita income ($12,651). The average per capita income for the city is $29,383, according to 1998 data from the D.C. Office of Planning.

According to more recent surveys and estimates of employment from the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, the District of Columbia's 2000 annual average jobless rate stood at 5.8%- higher than the national average of 4.0%. Youth employment figures reflect important labor market trends for young people entering the economy as well. In 1999, the Urban Institute's analysis of United States Census data found that there was a disproportionate impact of unemployment for young people aged 16-19 in Wards 7 and 8. While 24% of total youth unemployed in the District in this age group resided in Ward 8, youth in Ward 3 represented 1% of all of District youth aged 16-19 who were unemployed.

There are other social and educational factors bearing on individual and community well-being, such as educational achievement and family health status, which Commissioners agreed were crucial to understand relative risk in relation to needs and opportunities for the city's youth. Some of the major findings related to arrest and violence declines are analyzed in the next chapter on juvenile justice system interactions, however, the Youth Development Subcommittee's analysis of some of the most important measures of children and youth well-being documented from a variety of public agencies and in the recently-published and comprehensive *DC Kids Count 2000* reflect significant strides. No one measure can capture the varied experiences of children and youth, but the city's children and youth appear to enjoy a higher quality of life during the past few years. Consistent declines in births to single teenage mothers have occurred over the past few years, a finding which has netted the District of Columbia substantial

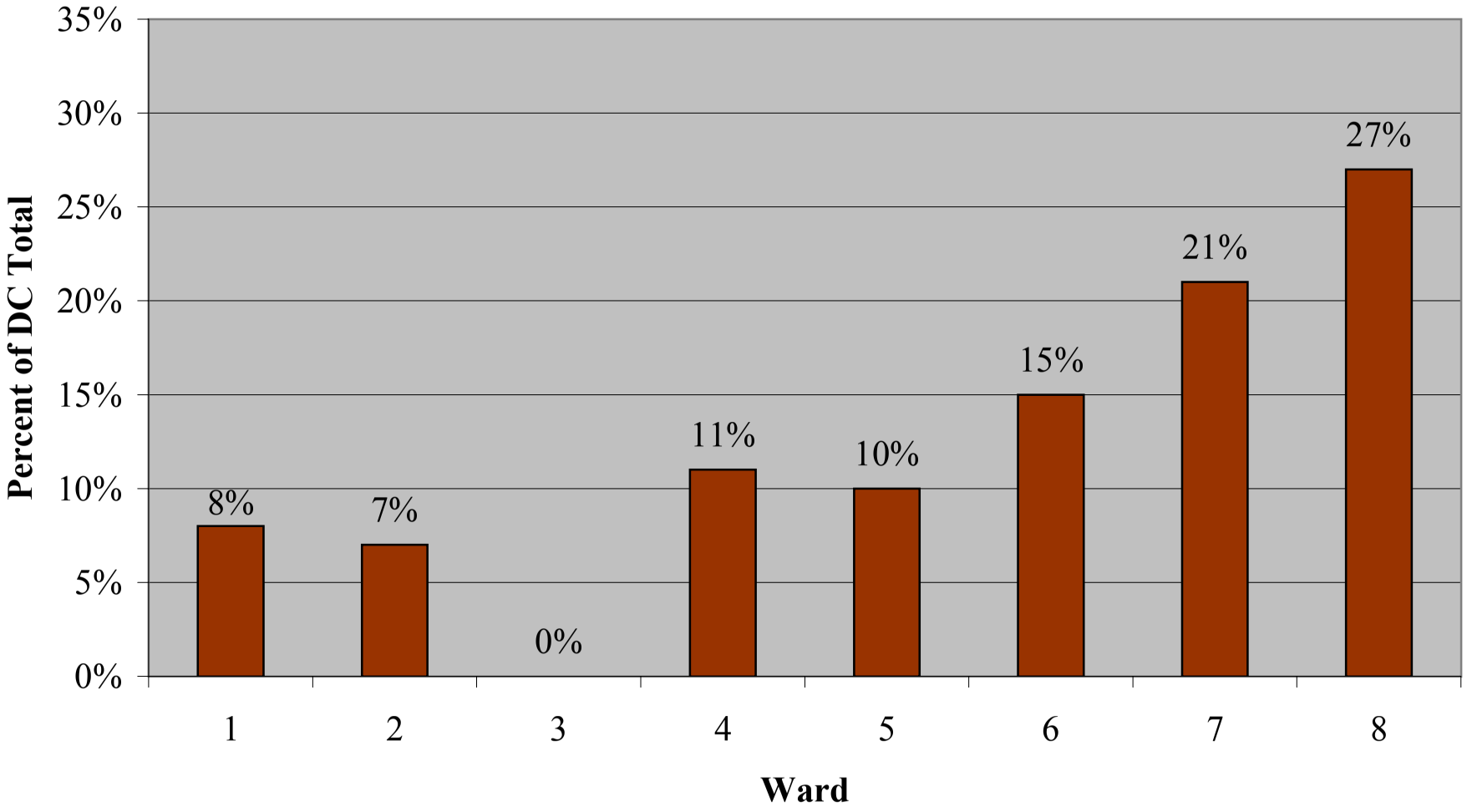
bonuses authorized under federal welfare reform legislation. Notable decreases have also occurred in birth of low-weight babies (risk factor for infant mortality) and a 20% decline in cases of sexually-transmitted diseases among children and youth. In terms of their educational experiences, DC students currently test at or near the national level in the first five grades and score above their peers nationally in 6th and 8th grades. Math scores exhibited similar improvements in 2000, with ten of eleven grades exhibiting gains (See Figure 7). In terms of graduation trends, the rate remains close to 50%.

Despite recent gains in several areas of child and youth well-being, there are also other disparities in economic and living conditions across the city which may help, in part, to explain educational and social disparities, as well as risk factors for delinquency. According to 1998 data, 30% of children in Ward 8 are on cash assistance from the District of Columbia government, while in Ward 3 0% receive the same form of assistance (See Figure 8).

Risk Factors for Youth Crime and Violence

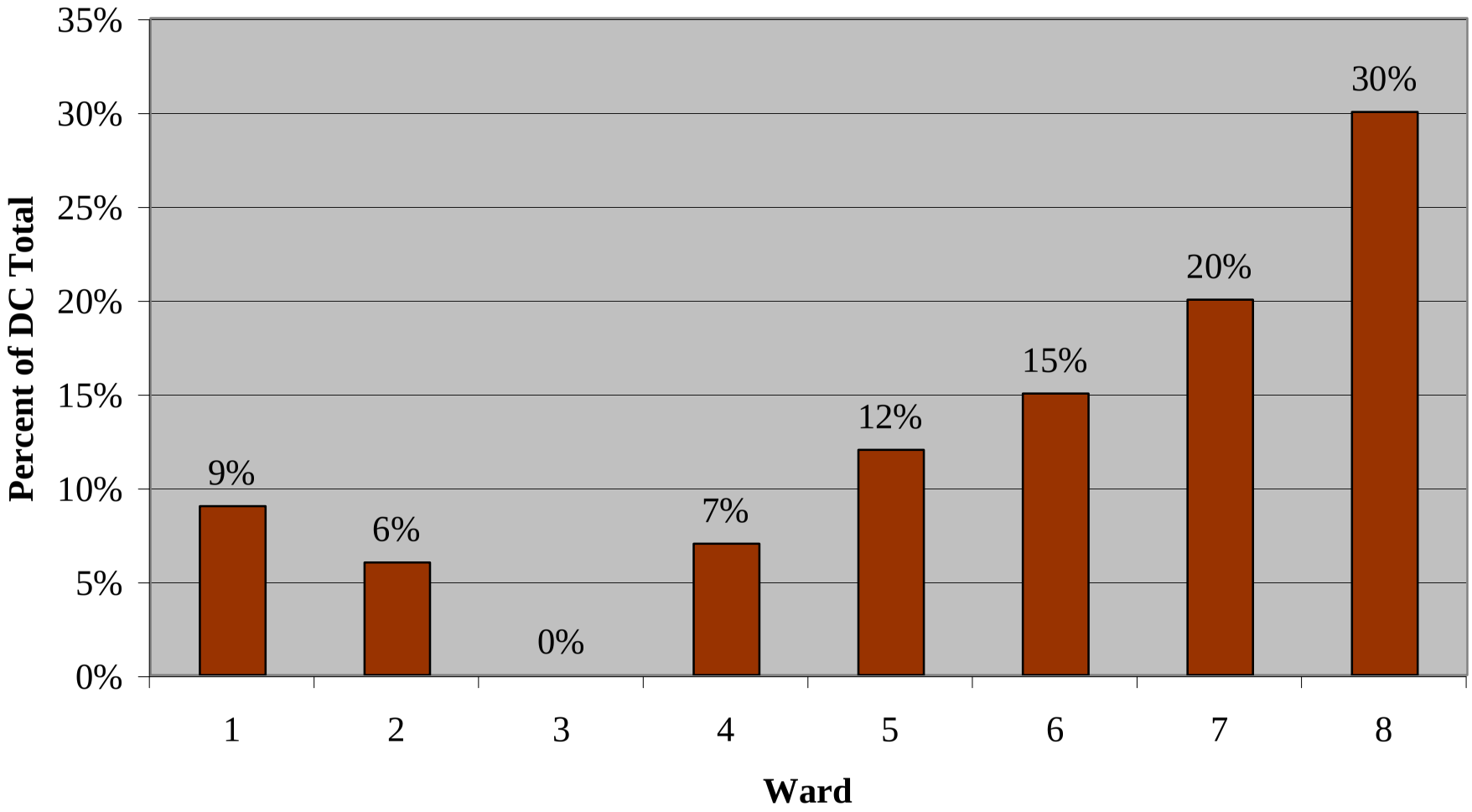
Youth may be put at risk for crime and violence through exposure to a variety of risks. Social science researchers have exhaustively documented the relationship between a number of individual and environmental variables and the incidence of youth crime and violence. Aggression, exposure to violence, abuse, low academic achievement, family disruption and dislocation, socioeconomic status, and race/ethnicity are all strongly correlated with youth crime and violence. In recent years, a number of community-based

Figure 7
Children Failing to Meet Grade 4-5 Basic Math by Ward, 1998



SOURCE: The Urban Institute, Capacity and Needs Assessment

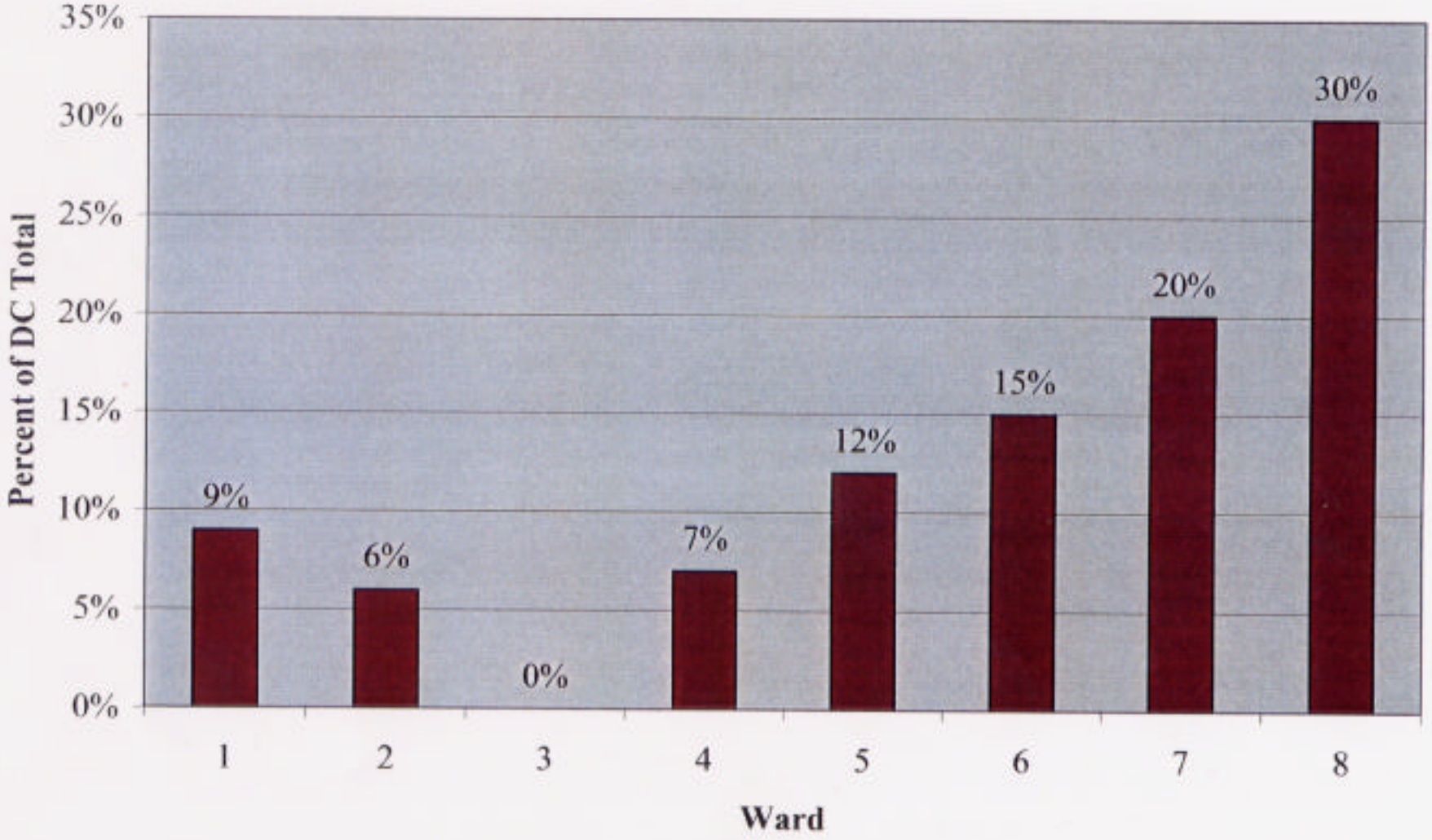
Figure 8
Children on Cash Assistance, Ages 0-17 by Ward, 1998



SOURCE: The Urban Institute, Capacity and Needs Assessment

Figure 8

Children on Cash Assistance, Ages 0-17 by Ward, 1998



SOURCE: The Urban Institute, Capacity and Needs Assesment (1999)

and academic researchers have also identified protective factors such as the level of neighborhood and community support networks and resources (often termed "social capital"). Longitudinal studies, such as the Chicago Neighborhood Human Development study conducted by Dr. Felton Earls of Harvard University, have noted the strong influence of "collective efficacy," where the degree to which neighborhood residents are willing to work together has been linked to rates of victimization and perpetration. Taken together, these bodies of research affirm that youth need strong support networks, both at home and in a variety of community contexts to increase their safety.

National and local research related to juvenile crime and violence patterns has also found that a small percentage of youth- overwhelmingly boys- are often responsible for a high percentage of violent incidents in a particular neighborhood. In her analysis of several of Washington, D.C.'s neighborhoods, Marcia Chaiken (1998) found similar delinquency and demographic patterns as in other cities. Chaiken reported that most boys involved in crime had little after school adult supervision, along with a set of basic unmet needs. Conversely, those who were engaged in sports or other structured activities were less likely to engage in crime. Truancy and expulsion were common among 76% of boys in her sample. As the level of seriousness related to delinquency increased, drug use and firearm or weapons carrying rates also increased. In addition, 15% of the boys in the sample of 213 reported belonging to gangs.

The Youth Development Subcommittee's and Commission's work related to youth development highlighted four critical areas for enhanced strategies to address identified needs and to strengthen the safety net for youth:

- Police/Youth relations
- Out of School time programming
- Community-based recreational spaces for children and youth
- Supportive health and social services: Substance abuse and Mental health services

Police/Youth Relations

The Commission listened to youth and providers in a variety of contexts regarding the state of police/youth relations in the District of Columbia. Former MPD Chief Rodney Monroe shared his concerns about training and resources with the Commission as well during a fall 2000 meeting and during public hearings in Spring 2001. Prior to his departure, Chief Monroe identified a lack of alternatives to arrest and detention, limited awareness of alternatives to arrest and detention among officers, lack of officer training about youth and youth issues, and truancy as core issues. Subsequent to his departure in mid 2001, the Commission has communicated with Inspector Robin Hoey, the Director of the Office of Youth Violence, and Inspector Lillian Overton, Director of the Youth and Preventive Services Division, to get an understanding of the range of programs that have

According to Chief Shannon Cockett, Director of MPD's Training Programs, efforts to expand role-based training, the recruitment of youth to be role leaders, and the incorporation of more research on how to relate to youth are a part of a new emphasis on youth. Currently, officers receive 39 hours of behavioral science during training, nine of which are spent dealing with "juvenile handling." Training for officers should involve extensive identification of citywide youth programming resources and other community-based services that could assist youth in their personal development.

Youth also share the perception that police officers are not adequately trained to deal with them or their unique issues. During a September 2000 youth panel about experiences in the juvenile justice system, several youth stated that they were often mistreated by police. They said that police do not read them their rights or treat them with respect. Some also felt that police held stereotypes about young people and their propensity for crime based on racist stereotypes. In addition, several youth expressed that they felt that police often are unusually harsh – both verbally and physically.

Four focus groups were conducted in the spring of 2001 to better understand the complex and critical issues regarding youth safety and the state of the juvenile justice system in the District of Columbia. Police/youth relations emerged as a major theme. The focus groups included:

1. Youth gang members and ex-gang members (May 21, 2001)
2. Youth involved with the juvenile justice system (May 22, 2001)

3. Youth service providers and probation officials (May 23, 2001)
4. Youth involved with the juvenile justice system (May 29, 2001)

Regarding youth safety and their relationships with police, each of the subgroups independently identified that the existence of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) is to "serve and protect" all community members equally. But, this theory is not true in practice. Racism, abuse of power, and unnecessary brutality diminish the youth's personal safety and prevent them from having a trusting relationship with the police. Specifically, the various focus groups identified the following perceptions about youth safety and relationships with the MPD:

Unfairness/MPD's Disparity in Treatment of Youth

Youth expressed their disdain for the MPD's disparity in its treatment and targeting of juvenile offenders as evidenced by policing only "[their] neighborhoods" and not Georgetown or Rock Creek. According to the youth, police officers fail to enforce all of the laws such as ticketing taxi drivers who "pass [them] by;" or inform the youth of his/her rights during an arrest. Additionally, police need to respond more expeditiously to service calls from youth.

Youth service providers and probation officers concurred that the MPD is inconsistent in its treatment of youth based on race and class and acknowledged that MPD's hypocrisy often discredits its service.

Racism and Discrimination/MPD's Disparity in Targeting Youth for Juvenile Offenses

Focus groups expressed a belief that police target youth who are "innocently" fraternizing with their friends and harass the group of individuals based on preconceived stereotypes or assumptions. For example, police perform unwarranted searches and pull over vehicles simply because they suspected a youth was allegedly committing an offense. During the search of gang members, police often arrest another individual who was simply passing by the gang on the grounds of "guilt by association" without further investigating his relationship to the group or asking the youth themselves. In many cases, youth articulated how police would also "plant drugs" on them to warrant an arrest.

Classism

Youth identified that the MPD discriminates among different socioeconomic classes and how this classicism often dictates punishment. Whereas wealthier White youth who deal drugs on the streets are merely fined for their offense, Black and Latino youth who commit lesser charges such as possessing drugs are arrested. Juveniles lamented that classism persists because Whites will never be arrested given the fact that Whites are more able to pay their fines. Some youth also contend that when a White juvenile is brought to the court, he/she is usually diverted because the judge will "identify the individual as a member from an outstanding family." In short, the "rich get off."

Unnecessary force

Both youth providers and the youth agreed that the MPD use unnecessary force and aggression in its interaction with an alleged offender. Whether it is physical violence (e.g. kicking, hitting, and pushing) or use of weapons during an unwarranted search, youth argue that they have no means of defending themselves. Moreover, the police "put the cuffs on too tight" and "hesitate to get the dogs off you." Service providers perceive the MPD's treatment of youth as a more psychological and developmental impediment: police point their guns at the youth far too often, encouraging violence with a deadly weapon and abuse their authority. In their own words, service providers and probation officers stated: "the police are not 'peace' officers." All stakeholders concede that the combination of a "badge and gun" is "deadly."

Mistrust

Youth providers further described the relationship between youth and MPD as "adversarial and tense." Police fail to provide a "nurturing" paradigm whereupon youth can build a relationship based on trust and respect. Service providers believe that youth are unable to communicate and express their needs in the absence of a nurturing authority figure. Some youth explained their mistrust for the MPD on the grounds of sexual abuse; a young girl shared her knowledge of friends who have been allegedly raped by officers.

Disrespect

Subjected to unnecessary force, unwarranted searches, and commands, youth generally sense a grave degree of disrespect by the MPD for their general welfare and

safety. This was illustrated in one incident shared by a youth who told everyone that he was stripped outside publicly during an arrest. "Youth distrust for the MPD is justified," remarked youth providers. They concede police are "hung up on their authority" and possess a "lack of respect for youth as citizens."

Cultural Differences

Further discussion among service providers and probation officers led to the identification of cultural differences between police and youth and their families. Specifically, some youth expressed the need to build a bridge between the Hispanic community and the MPD.

With respect to youth culture in particular, it was noted that compromise is difficult given the different cultures among youth, which was characterized as one of survival and that of the police as one of control. The result: adversity.

Alienation from the Community

One of the key themes raised by both youth and service providers is the lack of MPD involvement within the community. While the MPD is present and highly visible

at venues associated with juvenile offenses (e.g. schools and recreation centers), police are absent at public places that encourage interaction and dialogue with community members (e.g. neighborhood forums). Providers suggested that police should walk through the neighborhoods and drive with their windows down to demonstrate their approachability to youth, while probation officers recommend that police be more involved with the youth's families before arrest. A gap in communication exists due, in part, to police tendency to alienate themselves from community events.

It is important to note that not all police officers practice the outlined characteristics but that subsection of the MPD is the minority. Youth also noted that they should also be recruited and integrated into the training process in order to enhance and improve perceptions of their various cultures. Departmental leadership should also cultivate an environment in which training of officers involves attention to the needs of young people in the city, as part of an effort to divert them from unnecessary detention and commitment.

During the course of a site visit in May 2001 to Boston, Massachusetts, where Commission members spoke at length with leaders of the much-lauded Youth Gang Task Force as part of an effort to learn how other cities have addressed youth crime, the subject of police and community/youth relations emerged as a key theme. Very similar to the District of Columbia in population and other demographic characteristics, Boston has worked hard to educate and train (on an ongoing basis) its officers to deal with young people. After a period in which it experienced the most homicides to date – 152 in 1990- the city reassessed its old strategies and formed new partnership. One Deputy Chief

explained that these partnerships were "not just around critical incidents," but were part of a long-term cultural and institutional change.

Mentoring of youth was also viewed as integral to this strategy. In addition to bolstering its technological capability to understand the spatial and temporal aspects of youth crime, police officials worked with the US Attorney, the District Attorney, and community leaders and activists to conduct outreach to youth and to prosecute gang members. Summer and school-based programs funded by John Hancock and other private industry leaders helped to keep "at risk" youth busy and sustain their attention on career development, substance abuse prevention, and other constructive activities.

At bottom, Boston officials incorporated youth development theory and practice into their policing strategies. Subsequent to the formation of these collaborative partnerships, they experienced an almost two year period without a single youth homicide. Public officials and police leaders continue to reach out to young people and youth serving agencies through many community-based contexts. The Ella J. Baker House in the Dorchester section of Boston, for example, has convened weekly meetings with police, social service agencies, juvenile justice advocates, and United Way and other critical funders to identify youth needs and opportunities (See Appendix D). The District Attorney also maintains a school violence prosecutor who works with schools and with social workers to ensure that school conferences take place before problems result in truancy and expulsion.

The Commission's conversations regarding MPD's work with youth have uncovered several major initiatives in the area of youth safety. However, staffing and lack of resources to conduct comprehensive outreach appear to be barriers to change. The Office of Youth Violence, which conducts extensive outreach in Wards 7 and 8, runs many programs with Boys and Girls Clubs, the Clergy Police Community Partnership, the East Capitol Center for Change, and other community-based organizations. Currently, however, the Office of Youth Violence has 3 officers who are assigned to areas covered by the 6th and 7th Police Districts. Though it has no designated youth corps, the Youth and Preventive Services Division works to divert youth before they enter the juvenile justice system. Attendance at various police and community-sponsored events by members of both of these divisions also reveals that many officers are making efforts to bridge the chasm between youth cultures and themselves. But, it appears that a consistent group of officers attend the same events.

Unlike Boston, with approximately twice the number of police districts as DC and where approximately 50 of its 2,400 officers form a high status youth police corps, police officials who lead the MPD youth-serving divisions do not hold Assistant Chief designations. Boston police officials shared that the information-sharing processes needed to build effective youth policing strategies must be anchored in achieving accountability from across a number of divisions and not just those working with youth. This means that the youth-serving divisions are able to communicate information across all divisions, which -to use the words of one Assistant Chief in Boston- "suppress crime but mentor youth."

Finally, the Commission's analysis of this area finds that policies and procedures related to "Handling Juveniles" (title of policy memo) need to be updated in official Police Department training manuals and policy memos (See Appendix F). *General Order 305.1*- "Handling Juveniles"- is the official policy and procedure for dealing with youth. Established on December 10, 1990, it has not been updated since April 19, 1991. It is outdated. For example, it makes reference to the Receiving Home that closed in1995 as the place to take youth. There is no mention of the Central Processing Unit, range of diversion programs or protocols, or leading MPD officials who handle such matters.

Out of School Time Programming Options

Many programs exist to serve youth of various ages in a variety of contexts. However, it is apparent that gaps in programming options for certain age groups and limited slots in existing programs sometimes make it difficult for all youth to feel like they belong to a program or take part in out of school activities. The Commission has found that special attention is needed to bring programs to scale, and that public efforts to market these programs to young people must be enhanced. While an updated capacity and needs assessment would certainly provide a more authoritative documentation of the geographic distribution of need, Commission conversations with public officials, youth, and youth providers disproportionately identified the following needs:

- **Programs that link employment with academic mentorship**. There is a need for more integrated programs, such as the Department of Employment Services'

(DOES) *Passport to Work Program* and *School to Careers Initiative*, which provide mentoring. Passport to Work provides year round employment readiness experiences, academic enrichment programs, and pre-employment work maturity skills training for those aged 14-21 years of age. Funded by the *Workforce Investment Act*, the program also focuses on occupational skills that youth need to maintain long-term employment. Components include a summer employment opportunities program and employer partnership initiatives with the federal government and private sectors.

- **Services for youth transitioning from juvenile justice system**. Youth who are transitioning out of the juvenile justice system are often caught in a gap, where they do not get the same services and opportunities that other youth in schools have received. The Department of Employment Services, which receives funding for these youth under several federal grants, has failed to maintain a consistent "safety net" for these youth as they re-enter communities. YSA, which has a number of transition programs for youth as part of their aftercare services network, has initiated communication with DOES to expand programming options for youth who are making the transition from the juvenile justice system but has had little success in the release of funds to create a seamless transition through collaboration. Both the *Youth Opportunity Program* and the *Passport to Work Program* provide significant financial support to create experiences for both in-school and out-of-school youth.

- **More comprehensive outreach and resources for older high school aged youth (13-17 yrs of age).** Often the most vulnerable in terms of risk for crime and violence, this group is often without creative options in neighborhoods and communities. The lack of a movie theater "east of the River," for example, severely limits the ability of poor and often minority youth to spend time in their communities engaged in activities that are enjoyed by their counterparts in other parts of the city. In addition to stimulating academic and employment opportunities, there are many unexplored opportunities for industry partnership. Summer and school-year job opportunities and/or job readiness programs were cited as critical by young people and Commissioners in a variety of contexts. Even with awareness of opportunities, youth testified that they were confused about timelines and application process.

- **Dropout Prevention/Truancy**. A high priority must be placed on the prevention of truancy and the lowering of dropout rates. The absence of significant in-school suspension options produces lost opportunities for intervention to prevent truancy and other risks for crime and violence. With a report that 39 secondary schools have suspension options, DCPS is working with the Courts to divert chronic truants, as well as to ensure that Attendance Intervention Programs conduct extensive outreach. DCPS has recently made this a priority in its planning efforts, according to Superintendent Paul Vance. Specifically, DCPS is working to ensure that youth who are at risk for truancy receive help before they drop out of school rather than just expand the number of truancy centers. In 1999-2000, the

Metropolitan Police Department picked up 831 truants; in 1997-1998, it picked up 643 truants.

Creation of recreational spaces and enjoyable neighborhood places for youth using currently vacant and under utilized property.

Commissioners recognize that vacant and under utilized properties present the City with an opportunity to utilize public space to meet demand for enjoyable recreational centers and other activities for youth. Efforts should be made among agencies serving children and youth to expand the number of vacant properties that can be converted into high quality programming environments for children and youth. For example, the Department of Parks and Recreation and DC Public Schools might work with appropriate District Offices to identify properties in need of restoration and/or reclassification to open up new opportunities for community-based sites. An important first step is also recognition that children and youth should be a part of the economic goals of the city, and that these sites could enhance the quality of life for youth and the long-term sustainability of the communities in which they live.

Addressing the need for supportive health and social services: substance abuse and mental health among children and youth.

Substance abuse

The lack of community and school-based substance use prevention and treatment alternatives for youth is of crisis proportions in the District of Columbia. The DC Department of Health's Addiction, Prevention, and Recovery Administration (APRA) has elevated this to a high priority, but current practice finds that only adjudicated youth receive any kind of comprehensive services in this area. This is extremely critical, given the high proportion of youth testing positive for substances at intake - reported as 60% by the Director of CSS. Drug-related offenses compromise approximately 40% of committing offenses and almost 20% of those in residential placement.

Supportive services are needed to address risk for substance use at early stages of children's development. According to the 1999 school-based *Youth Risk Behavior Survey*, eighteen percent (18%) of youth admitted that they "smoked a whole cigarette" before the age of 13. Approximately 28% admitted that they "drank more than a few sips of alcohol" and 12.3% admitted that they "tried marijuana" – both before the age of 13. Youth in Washington, D.C. fell significantly below the average for the Nation in answering the questions related to smoking a cigarette and alcohol. They scored one percentage point above the national average on the question about marijuana.

The Commission recognizes that early prevention messages must come from multiple contexts, including home, neighborhood, and school. Given the high correlation between drugs and risk for violence among youth, it is imperative that the District take immediate steps to adopt primary and secondary prevention opportunities to address drug use among its youngest citizens.

Mental health services

Commission members found that children and youth are assessed in a variety of contexts in child and youth serving agencies, including agencies that exist as a part of the juvenile justice system. As a matter of practices, different agencies use different risk assessment instruments (sometimes not validated) to recommend a diverse array of mental health services and other supports. The Department of Mental Health Services has initiated processes to establish school-based mental health services in every school in the District of Columbia. Commissioners also recommend that the Department of Mental Health Services continue its work with the Department of Human Services to ensure that there is a comprehensive continuum established for children and youth in need of critical services, both inside and outside of the juvenile justice system.

DC Public Schools is also working more closely with the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth, and Families and the State Education Office in a "Transforming Schools" initiative to identify students in low performing schools as part of a broader effort to provide supportive enrichment and supportive services. In addition, DC Public Schools is engaged in a survey of their Non Public Day School students, many of whom have severe emotional and learning disabilities and require intensive case management. According to the most recent data obtained from DC Public Schools, 18% of students in the public school system are classified as special education.

With respect to critical substance abuse and mental health issues, Commissioners also recommended that the District of Columbia strengthen the following areas:

- **Prevention and treatment alternatives.** A prioritization of juvenile prevention education and youth-serving substance use treatment programs and mental health services is needed as major goals of the District's *Healthy People 2010* public health objectives is elevate attention to mental health and substance abuse.
- **Coordination at Mayoral level.** Establish liaisons between the proposed Youth Services Coordinating Commission and the Mayor's Substance Abuse Advisory Council and the Department of Mental Health as a strategy to ensure seamless delivery of services.
- **Interagency diversion strategies.** Establish an interagency framework for the Office of the Corporation Counsel (OCC) to work with Court Social Services (CSS) and the Metropolitan Police Department to design and implement alternatives to incarceration and diversion opportunities for youth who are in need of treatment and counseling for substance use and mental health issues.
- **Services for juvenile reentry population.** Establish departmental liaisons with the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth, and Families to continue work on the provision of supportive wraparound youth mental health and substance abuse services as part of a comprehensive reentry strategy for juvenile offenders reentering communities.

- **Department of Health programming.** Direct the Addiction, Prevention, and Recovery Administration (APRA) to bolster its efforts to aggressively target all children and youth- preschool through post-secondary ages - with consistent prevention education messages. Engage private sector, faith community, after school and recreation centers, and parents and other community members. In addition, promote the establishment of a framework to create dual diagnosis residential treatment options with outpatient components.